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ABSTRACT

A national survey of 102 faculty members (reflecting a return rate of 56%) in schools and departments of journalism and mass communication focused on several problems in hiring new personnel. An equal number of respondents agreed and disagreed that journalism and mass communication is well-served by hiring practices prevalent in the field. Results suggest six major areas of concern: advertising the job, providing adequate information, treating candidates honestly, conducting campus interviews, avoiding problems in searches, and dealing with discrimination. Findings suggest that units can damage their ability to hire considerably when they fail to treat candidates appropriately. (Contains five notes and two tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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Some Hiring Practices in Schools and Departments of Journalism

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This national survey of 102 faculty members in Schools and Departments of Journalism and Mass Communication focused on several problems in hiring new personnel: advertising the position, providing adequate information throughout the hiring process and after candidates arrive for interviews, treating candidates honestly, conducting campus interviews, avoiding problems in searches and dealing with discrimination. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to explore these issues. Some suggestions for improving recruitment procedures are made.

Martinson is a professor in the FIU School of Journalism and Mass Communication and Ryan is a professor and head of the journalism program in the UH School of Communication.

Hiring Practices in Schools and Departments of Journalism

The applicant was genuinely interested in the senior-level faculty position. The invitation to the interview was accepted enthusiastically and the applicant traveled a great distance to talk with the faculty. He learned only after he arrived at the institution that the program was about to lose its accreditation by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. He did not sit in on a faculty meeting, as planned, because of a faculty quarrel. The program's problems were not described to him prior to the interview.

Then there was the applicant who accepted an apparently genuine invitation to interview for a position. The applicant, at great inconvenience, interrupted a 4,000-mile family vacation because the program was anxious to fill the position. He even had to buy new clothes because he could not get home before the interview. The applicant went for the interview and then did not hear from the "anxious" unit for weeks. Finally, he learned the job had gone to an internal candidate who had the job locked up from the start.

These are just two of many stories about the recruitment of faculty in journalism and mass communication. Catherine Cassara, who described her own disheartening interviewing experiences in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, reported that a faculty member at a prestigious institution called to tell her she had an assistant professorship wrapped up following her interview. The faculty member called later to say he had passed on erroneous information.[1] She also showed up for a research presentation to find only she and the department head's secretary were there.

Another time, Cassara was told after she arrived for an interview for one of two positions that the program had interviewed a couple, and that if one member of the couple was hired, the other member would get the other job. "Since I had come in a day early just to save the school on air fare, happy did not describe how I felt," she said.[2]

Little guidance is available from journalism and mass communication sources for job seekers or for search committee members. The Modern Language Association, however, does offer advice for

both. The MLA Committee on Careers provides a "Checklist for Job Seekers,"[3] and the MLA Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities offers "Advice to Search Committee Members and Job Seekers on Faculty Recruitment and Hiring."[4] Both documents recommend ways to avoid some of the problems suggested by Cassara and by those who have passed on horror stories from the recruiting wars.

This study attempts to determine how widespread the practices described by Cassara and others are. These questions guided the research:

(1) How well do former applicants think they were treated by journalism and mass communication programs when they applied for teaching positions?

(2) How important do former applicants think various aspects of the hiring process are?

(3) Are respondents' rankings of the importance of 10 potential behaviors in a job search meaningfully related to their rankings of their own experiences with those behaviors?

(4) How have applicants reacted personally to positions for which they have applied?

Method

The three-part questionnaire was based on the literature, the authors' personal experiences and the experiences of others with whom we talked. Part I asked applicants to indicate how they were treated when they applied for jobs and to rate the importance of 10 aspects of the hiring process. Questions focused on how well candidates were kept informed, how well organized searches were and how candid faculty were, among other things (see Table 1). Each item was followed by two five-point scales (one for importance and one for the applicant's own experience).

Part II asked respondents to indicate how they have reacted personally regarding positions for which they have applied. Eight statements, each followed by a five-point rating scale, indicate, among other things, how satisfied they were with their treatment and how they felt about prevailing hiring practices (see Table 2).

Part III requested qualitative and demographic data. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they experienced discrimination and whether they had to pay travel costs to interviews, and to identify

the greatest weaknesses in hiring processes they have experienced. They also recounted their own job search histories and teaching experience.

The sample was drawn from AEJMC's 1992 *Journalism & Mass Communication Directory*. All schools belonging to the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication and listing a faculty were included as part of the sample.[5] The list included 181 institutions.

One questionnaire was mailed to each school. We assumed that assistant professors might have more recent experiences seeking jobs, so we first tried to sample assistant professors. If a school did not list an assistant professor, an associate professor was sampled; if no associate professor was listed, a full professor was sampled. Individuals who had administrative responsibilities were avoided.

Questionnaires, cover letters and return envelopes were mailed to the 181 individuals sampled; a followup containing all materials was mailed four weeks later to those who failed to respond to the first mailing. A total of 102 responded, a return rate of 56 percent.

Results

Failure to keep candidates adequately informed apparently is the weakest part of the hiring process. Respondents disagreed that units keep candidates adequately informed *throughout the process* about how a search is going (Item 1), and they disagreed that units keep candidates adequately informed *after candidates have come for interviews* (Item 2). They agreed rather strongly that both actions are important, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Respondents expressed some doubt that the faculty whom candidates meet on interviews are candid (Item 3), that units typically put enough effort into making the hiring process humane and fair (Item 4) and that most units respond promptly to applicants (Item 5). Respondents agreed with these items, but just barely. Furthermore, they agreed rather strongly that ideas expressed in items 3, 4 and 5 are important.

Units apparently do best in two areas, according to these respondents: The faculty candidates meet during interviews are courteous (Item 10), and they seem genuinely concerned about hiring the right persons (Item 9). Respondents agreed rather strongly that these behaviors are important, as indicated in Table 1.

Respondents' rankings of the importance of 10 potential behaviors in a job search and their rankings of their own experiences with those behaviors are compared in Table 1. The largest differences in rankings are reflected in data for Items 4, 5, 8 and 10.

Respondents suggested that it is extremely important that units respond promptly when they receive applications (Item 5) and that units put enough effort into making the hiring process humane and fair (Item 4). These items were ranked one and two in importance, but six and seven in practice. They also suggested that it is not as important that faculty be courteous during interviews (Item 10) and that advertisements list realistic qualifications for the salaries offered (Item 8). The items were ranked six and 10 in importance, but one and three in practice.

Respondents also were asked about their personal experiences in the job hunt. The importance of handling the interview process well is reflected in responses to Items 1 and 2 in Table 2. Approximately 55 percent agreed that the way in which their applications were handled was an important factor in the decision to accept the current position, and 25.8 percent said they had passed up good positions because of the way they were treated during the hiring process.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Perhaps most disturbing, 35.7 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement, "Based on my experiences, I would say journalism and communication education is well-served by hiring practices now prevalent in the field" (Item 8), as shown in Table 2. Only 35.7 percent agreed with that statement. Furthermore, 56.3 percent said they agreed with Item 7, "I have little respect for some units because of the way I was treated when I applied for positions with those units."

Three specific problems are reported in Table 2. Sixty-seven percent agreed that they have applied for positions and then received no response, other than an initial acknowledgement that the application was received (Item 5); 41.5 percent agreed that persons in interviews have passed on erroneous information (Item 4); and 41.1 percent agreed that they had interviewed for positions with units that already had decided to hire someone else (Item 3).

On the positive side, 64.7 percent agreed that they have been satisfied, in general, with the treatment they have gotten from units to which they have applied (Item 6). Only 22.3 percent disagreed.

Discussion

Recruiting quality faculty is the most important activity in which a school or department of journalism or mass communication can engage. Without knowledgeable, efficient, articulate faculty members, a unit cannot fulfill its potential, even if it boasts the best students and the most outstanding facilities.

Our quantitative and qualitative results indicate that all is not well in the hiring system in journalism and mass communication. For example, an equal number of respondents agreed and disagreed with the statement: "Based on my experiences, I would say journalism and communication education is well-served by hiring practices now prevelent in the field." Nearly 30 percent were unsure how well-served the field is.

Results suggest six major areas of concern: advertising the job, providing adequate information, treating candidates honestly, conducting campus interviews, avoiding problems in searches and dealing with discrimination.

Advertising the job. Several respondents reported encountering difficulties because of the way jobs were advertised. Respondents agreed, but not strongly, that they found advertisements typically list realistic qualifications for the salaries offered (Table 1) and more than 41 percent indicated they had interviewed with units that had decided to hire someone else, but that advertised the position simply to fulfill a legal requirement (Table 2).

Several respondents agreed with the sentiment of the teacher who noted that "Advertised job descriptions are not always exactly what the employer is looking for." Another observed that "Job announcements are too vague to be of much help. I interviewed a comm. department once, e.g., & focused on relating my research to interpersonal literature--only to find out AFTER the hiring decision had been made that they were really looking for a mass comm research esp. a TV & children person. This is my *primary* area of research, but I didn't play it up in the interview because I thought it would work against me!"

Some criticized advertisements as being less than honest: "I think the ad should be totally *honest*. If an internal candidate is preferred--say so. If the salary is capped at $25,000, say so. Cut out the games. Candidates (including me) want to know all the rules before they decide to play the game."

One difficulty is that faculty and administrators don't always know what they want. Several cited "disagreement among faculty about what skills and what duties the new hire should have." That sometimes means that "Departments put out general ads, then fight later about what they really think they want."

One reason for the lack of precise criteria for a position is the unstable budgets of many departments. This means units often are "unable to hire as many people as necessary because of budget limitations and therefore searching for an amalgamation of skills in a single individual." Departments often just take whomever is the best "fit."

Providing adequate information. Responses to two Table 1 items suggest that critical information frequently is lacking. Respondents disagreed that most units keep candidates adequately informed *throughout the hiring process* and that most units keep candidates adequately informed *after the candidates arrive for interviews* (Table 1). A substantial minority even said they had received no responses to applications, other than initial acknowledgements (Table 2).

One respondent said he received "No feedback after initial response. I was a finalist at a major university, but I always had to contact *them* for status reports on the search." A search committee member viewed the situation from a different perspective: "In my current department, I

experienced a situation during a search for another position in which we lost the best candidate by failing to respond to her inquiries about the search process."

Treating candidates honestly. Our respondents agreed the faculty candidates meet during interviews are honest and truthful (Table 1), but they barely agreed, suggesting a problem exists. Furthermore, many indicated they personally had received erroneous information during interviews (Table 2). The importance of honest, accurate information is reflected in many comments.

One respondent suggested there is too much "Uncertainty about university commitments--i.e., salary, office space, etc." Another was more specific: "There is not a fair and honest description given of the number of hours one is required to put into activities outside the classroom; advising, counseling, paperwork, 'marketing' the institution to current students who threaten to leave, and to prospective students to encourage them to 'pick our major. . . ,' etc. A third respondent bemoaned "Dishonesty about teaching load. Dishonesty about tenureability. Dishonesty about research support."

Conducting campus interviews. Our respondents suggested that campus interviews are not always successful. Most agreed, but not strongly, that campus interviews are well organized, and they agreed strongly that most faculty are courteous during interviews and that most candidates seem concerned about hiring the right persons (Table 1).

Comments suggested areas in which the campus interview might be improved. "Humanize it!" one respondent said. "Don't schedule candidate's time every minute. Leave some free time, but be hospitable." Another suggested the unit "Plan the interview so it doesn't ramble. Let candidates know, in writing, what department wants to know before they face what feels like a thesis defense committee." Above all, most said units should make the process less taxing. "The process is incredibly grueling," a respondent said. "I have interviewed with 30 people in 2 days."

Other respondents objected to what they saw as "poorly selected lecture opportunities--wrong course, wrong group," to unfocused questions during interviews and to a lack of social interaction to determine an interviewee's personal fit with the department and institution.

Avoiding problems in searches. Some respondents objected to the ways in which institutions sometimes reimburse interviewees. "Some schools pay for travel, hotel, etc. *AFTER* the fact, sometimes up to *6 months* later," one said. "This places a financial burden on job candidates, especially those who interview at 3 or more places. Interviewing institutions could *easily* arrange to pay in advance for the candidates' travel & hotels, & this should be the norm. Grad students simply don't have the $ to cover these expenses for months before reimbursement checks come."

Other respondents objected to some institutions' failure to publish salary ranges, to the alleged phoniness of the teaching presentations, to the difficulty of getting a sense of a person as a teacher, to differences between verbal and written offers, to a lack of sufficient emphasis on teaching quality, to the exclusion of students from the search process and to failure to verify the accuracy of resumes sufficiently. Another respondent objected because, too frequently, "Good teaching is taken as a given and research is given too much weight."

Dealing with discrimination. Several respondents said they were the victims of discrimination in hiring. The problems fell into four categories: age, sex, race and experiential discrimination.

One applicant noted that his age was mentioned by an administrator during a final discussion. Several suggested sex discrimination is practiced, although there wasn't always agreement about the *direction* of that discrimination. "There is a strong preference in the field for female candidates that works to the extreme disadvantage of male candidates, even very good ones," one said. One woman said she knew she was hired because she was female, while another respondent said screening committees have used discriminatory procedures that excluded applicants from interviews. "And," he said, "in other cases women were offered less than their male counterparts, discounted during interviews and generally treated shabbily."

Other respondents objected to what they saw as racial discrimination. "Once a less qualified minority was hired over me. In other cases I've been told, 'we're looking for a woman' or 'we're looking for a minority.' People admit to discrimination on the basis of gender or race if the

discrimination is against white males." Another said, "Affirmative action requirements sometimes result in unqualified people being interviewed and drives up the cost of the search process."

One respondent suggested a solution to the problem: "What is needed is some truthfulness about what such 'diversity' requirements do to a class of citizens. I believe that minorities & women have been historically excluded from the benefits of society. I disagree that the method to fight this is to make a new disadvantaged class. We *must* do everything possible to educate, recruit and train numbers of historically excluded classes. That includes conducting *exhaustive* searches."

Other respondents objected to questions about "Sexual orientation--probes about 'wife,' 'children,' etc." One said, "There is sometimes a bias against professionals with little academic experience. Some academics on my interview committee asked questions that indicated surprise that I would consider a teaching job and that since I was only a 'journalist' I was not 'scholarly.'" Another objected to "Putting an assumed value on professional experience as a criterion for teaching & contributions to an academic program. That is, *overestimating* the value of professional job experience."

Conclusions

Some problems in the hiring process are intractable, but solutions must be found. Our results indicate that units can damage their ability to hire considerably when they fail to treat candidates appropriately. It may be true that journalism and mass communication education has an over-supply of highly qualified candidates for most positions right now, but what if that supply should dry up? Units that have failed to keep their fences mended during the good years might pay a heavy price during the lean years as good candidates avoid them.

Furthermore, candidates who are not wanted this year might be more attractive for different positions during a later year. If their rejection during the earlier year was not handled well, they most certainly will be reluctant to apply again.

Respondents in our survey made two suggestions that could improve the hiring situation considerably. "Universities need to be more honest with potential candidates," one said. The other recommendation was that "We all need to work much harder and honestly at this."

Notes

[1] Catherine Cassara, "Fruitless Interviews and Tasteless Rejections: Job Hunting in Academe," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2 December 1992, p. B-3.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. B-3.

[3] Modern Language Association's Committee on Careers, "Checklist for Job Seekers," MLA, 10 Astor Place, New York, NY 10003-6981.

[4] Modern Language Association's Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Rights and Responsibilities, "Advice to Search Committee Members and Job Seekers on Faculty Recruitment and Hiring," MLA, 10 Astor Place, New York, NY 10003-6981.

[5] The University of Houston and Flordia International University were not sampled because the authors teach at those institutions.

Table 1

Respondents' Experience with and Importance of 10 Aspects of Faculty Hiring

Item	Mean Score: Respondents' Experience (Rank)	Mean Score: Item's Importance (Rank)
(1) Most units keep candidates adequately informed throughout the process about how the search is progressing.	3.4 (10)	1.7 (9)
(2) Most departments keep candidates adequately informed after the candidates come for interviews about how the hiring process is going.	3.1 (9)	1.6 (8)
(3) The faculty whom candidates meet on most interviews are candid.	2.8 (8)	1.6 (7)
(4) Units typically put enough effort into making the faculty hiring process humane and fair.	2.6 (7)	1.5 (2)
(5) Most units respond promptly to candidates from whom they receive applications.	2.6 (6)	1.4 (1)
(6) The faculty whom candidates meet on most interviews are truthful.	2.5 (5)	1.5 (4)
(7) Most campus interviews are well organized.	2.3 (4)	1.5 (5)
(8) Advertisements for faculty openings typically list realistic qualifications for the salaries offered.	2.2 (3)	1.8 (10)
(9) The faculty whom candidates meet on most interviews seem genuinely concerned about hiring the "right" persons.	2.0 (2)	1.5 (3)
(10) The faculty whom candidates meet on most interviews are courteous.	1.8 (1)	1.6 (6)

NOTE: a "1" on the questionnaire equaled strongly agree, while a "5" equaled strongly disagree

Table 2

Respondents' Personal Responses to Hiring Processes
Used for Positions for which They have Applied

Item	Agree	Disagree	Mean
(1) The manner in which my application was handled was an important factor in my decision to accept my current position.	54.9	18.7	2.5
(2) I have passed up a good position I was offered mainly because of the way I was treated during the hiring process.	25.8	49.4	3.4
(3) I have interviewed for a position with a unit that had already made a decision to hire someone else, but that advertised the position simply to fulfill legal requirements.	41.1	38.9	2.9
(4) Persons I have talked to as I interviewed or negotiated for a position have passed on erroneous information to me.	41.5	39.4	3.0
(5) I have applied for a faculty position and then received no response, other than an initial acknowledgement that the unit received the application.	67.0	24.7	2.2
(6) In general, I have been satisfied with the treatment I have received from units to which I have applied for positions.	64.7	22.3	2.5
(7) I have little respect for some units because of the way I was treated when I applied for positions with those units.	56.3	26.1	2.5
(8) Based on my experiences, I would say journalism and communication education is well-served by hiring practices now prevalent in the field.	35.7	35.7	3.1

NOTE: a "1" on the questionnaire equaled strongly agree, while a "5" equaled strongly disagree